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## BANDMASTERING THE CLASS-PERIOD

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The blank space between my title and the opening paragraph is for the *reader's* explanation of the term "bandmastering." I hope to see his comments in a future issue of the *English Journal*. Meanwhile he will have noticed that I did not say "recitation" period. Whatever a class-period may be, it is not a synonym for multigraphing a textbook. Why does teacher Dormant assume that pupil Secan will evolve any benefit from reciting what author Erudio states on page 27? I am sure he has never asked himself. Why? Perhaps parent Secan should go to teacher Dormant and demand why repeating author Erudio is better for the boy than evolving his native ability. The query would be difficult to answer. Perhaps it might result in less reciting and more evolving.

Reciting lessons is just sailing the buoyed channel of knowledge, merely following known routes, nonchalantly acknowledging the hallmarks of intelligence. That, surely, is not the object of teaching. Sooner, rather than later, youth should get into the unbuoyed channel of his own mind. There alone can he make any discoveries worth his while. But if he would avoid grounding on the mud flats at the channel's mouth, let him find the depths of his immediate anchorage, and then, as he pushes ahead up channel, take soundings as he goes. Perhaps I have been figurative long enough. Let me be specific by citing from experience—you to do your own synthesizing.

On Monday I led Section A in argumentation through four paragraphs of Burke's *Conciliation*. The pupils were convinced

that the author had not changed his position since 1766; that the vacillation of Parliament had caused indescribable complications in American affairs; that Burke, representing the opposition, had been persuaded to take the offensive; that he had drawn up a set of resolutions, but had hesitated to present them. Here were four definite statements made to an English audience, statements which my pupils did not deny. And after I had pointed out the significance of Burke's profound knowledge of coming events, what then? Nothing. The pupils had learned the results of his prophecy in the grades. Washington had killed the issue Burke had discussed; and all we could do was to perform the oft-repeated obsequies. The ringing of the period bell was a requiem to the passing of a recitation. "Requiescat," was the class sentiment.

On Tuesday we continued what had been a sort of psychic sitting on the preceding day. Ignoring our sentiment for yesterday's performance, we tried to produce cerebration between the living and the dead. I was the medium, but evidently not a successful one, for I failed to establish connections between my pupils and the spirit of Mr. Burke and his message. There was no common ground between them and him, *no point of contact for comparing notes*. As on Tuesday, so in each succeeding recitation to the end of Burke's peroration, each day's lesson was an unrelated voice from the dead. My pupils did not find him nor themselves. What? My fault? Your pupils do? Good. You are the very teacher I am anxious to meet. Tell me how you do it.

Do not think I mean to imply that my pupils had not glimpsed a well-thought-out argument in this speech during the time we had spent upon it. Not at all. I lay no claim to the skill it would require to keep boys and girls so busy at the task of looking up obsolete words, forgotten dates, classical allusions, biblical indebtedness, as to hide the obvious from them. But even so, it was Burke's argument, not theirs; it concerned what was, *not what now is*; it pointed to what had been done, *not to what might be undertaken*. The adolescent lives on this side of the past. His interest is here and now; and the here and now circumscribe his field of a priori knowledge. Let him clearly understand the *here* and *now*; then the *was* and the *yet-to-be will not be unattainable*.

Once in a moment of unguarded enthusiasm for Burke I asked a student of unsuspected individuality what he thought of the almost perfect brief of Burke's *Conciliation* that the class had just worked out. "It is icily regular and splendidly nil." When I asked him to explain his sacrilege, he came back with: "Well, you see, I haven't got to the place where I grow old looking backward. I am much more interested in what now is and what may come than in anything that was." From every conference with a sincere pupil I come away, like Coleridge's wedding guest, "a sadder and a wiser man."

During the four weeks that I bandmastered Section A through Burke, I also played a minor part in the arguments of Section B. On Monday we outlined the President's note to the Allies. We had no difficulty in making briefs. My problem was to keep the pupils from debating the issue then and there. There were hands enough to indicate willingness to contend that the author had, or had not, caused indescribable complications, that he had, or had not, taken the offensive, that he had, or had not, hesitated to present his views. I do not mean to say that the "Note" was of greater value than Burke's *Conciliation*; I only point out the fact that my pupils were dead to Burke and very much alive to the "Note." In this present issue was the lure to further seeking. The ultimate outcome was not known; the issue was alive. Here was a problem that had not been solved, but it needed solving, and the pupils felt themselves equal to the task.

On Tuesday there was no requiescat to violate, no resurrection to perform. The bell had called the recitation, not to a burial, but to a wedding. The pupils had gone home and asked father's opinions about the "voice of a neutral." Here was a subject about which fathers had opinions—and the pupils got them. Pretty soon fathers began to realize a strange thing: the teacher must be a real person! How else would he be discussing real problems? Out of this have developed many dehyphenated relations between parent and teacher.

Oh yes, pupils often brought biased opinions to class. But that was the point exactly. The teacher, with the class, had to adjudicate upon conflicting opinions, and from the pros and cons help the biased pupils to take a saner opinion back home.

I insist that pupils must think themselves into the faith that is theirs just as surely as grown persons. Ideas that are forced upon them, willy-nilly, destroy all initiative to independent thinking. That spells intellectual death. If pupils are expected to grow, to develop, under a teacher's supervision, they must be led to do *voluntary* work. That alone develops them. They must realize that when they study, the only thing worth while for them is the thing that *happens inside themselves*. Conscious of that, they will keep their real attention turned *inward*. The bandmastering method will not allow pupils to do this.

Give them tasks in the accomplishment of which they recognize more than a process of accumulating mental capital for cold storage. See that they find in the work they are doing something that is theirs, that they recognize as *belonging* to them. Once they experience a personal relationship to the world about them, the teacher's problem of getting honest work from the pupils is solved. Grades, promotions, punishments, must not be the motives for work. Let me repeat: work must be voluntary. So often it is not, because the teacher is too much in evidence. Like a bandmaster, he stands in front of his class and "conducts" the pupil's activities. If his acquired pitch is in A flat, all the pupils must perform in that key, not for their own benefit, but for the good of the class, or of the teacher; and for neither good will they perform after school days. Only by working for themselves, recognizing the fact that they are an organic part of the *now* as it comes to them day by day, will pupils evolve personalities compounded of themselves and their experiences.